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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: PM BERISHA MAKES ALBANIA'S CASE FOR NATO
MEMBERSHIP, HEARS NEED FOR DEMOCRATIC MATURITY AND RULE OF
LAW

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Richard G. Olson for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Albanian Prime Minister Berisha told a May 24 meeting of the North Atlantic Council that Albania had made tangible progress in meeting NATO's membership standards and he was confident Albania would be ready to receive an invitation to join the Alliance in 2008. Allies sent a consistent message that no decisions had been made yet on which aspirants would receive invitations at the 2008 NATO Summit and Albania had more work to do to improve the polarized political climate between the opposition and government, implement the rule of law, strengthen the police and judiciary, reform the electoral system, and fight organized crime and corruption. Ambassador Nuland stressed Albania had come a long way, but needed to overcome concerns about its level of democratic maturity and demonstrate that its progress in implementing the rule of law was irreversible. END SUMMARY.

BERISHA: WE HAVE MADE TANGIBLE PROGRESS

¶2. (C) PM Berisha, accompanied by Foreign Minister Basha, Defense Minister Mediu, and Deputy Speaker of Parliament and member of the opposition Socialist Party Bufi, told a meeting of the NAC on the subject of Albania's progress under NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) that Albania's goal of joining NATO was supported by 94 percent of Albanians and all political parties. Albania had achieved tangible results in implementing reforms necessary to prepare itself for full integration into the Alliance. He noted Parliament had this week set up a bi-partisan Committee on NATO Integration, which would draft and introduce legislation necessary to meet NATO's performance-based standards.

¶3. (C) Berisha acknowledged some deficiencies in the conduct of the February 18 local elections, but stressed that Albanians had expressed their will in full freedom without any governmental interference. The opposition had recognized the elections as free and fair and accepted the results. Berisha announced the formation of a multi-party parliamentary Electoral Reform Commission that would address necessary improvements to the election system. Albanian citizens would soon have biometric identity cards and work on a civil registry had begun.

¶4. (C) Berisha emphasized that fighting crime was a top priority for his government. In the last 20 months, 140 plus criminal groups and organizations had been disbanded, 7,475 drug traffickers and 79 human traffickers had been arrested. Two days ago, the government had established an economic crime task force composed of all law enforcement agencies with the help of U.S. and EU experts. Berisha said Albania could no longer be considered a source country for human trafficking or drugs. He predicted the State Police Law and

the Law on the Judiciary would soon be adopted.

¶5. (C) Berisha said his government placed a high priority on fighting corruption. Implementation of new standards that forbid the use of public funds for private purposes had resulted in tighter government spending. Albania had adopted legislation to protect whistle blowers. Due to successes in fighting smuggling and reducing financial evasion, government revenue collections rose 24 percent last year and were set to make a similar increase this year. A stable macroeconomic picture had contributed to a four-fold increase in foreign direct investment last year. Berisha expressed confidence that Albania's economy was on the "eve of a real take off."

¶6. (C) Berisha noted th 2006 NATO Summit Declaration sent a positive sinal to the Balkans. "More Balkans in NATO and lss NATO in Balkans" would lead to greater stability. Berisha said Albania would continue to be a force for stability for the region and expressed full support for UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari's proposal for resolving Kosovo's status.

¶7. (C) Berisha said the Albanian armed forces had undergone profound reforms. Albania intended to increase defense spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2008, two years earlier than originally planned, and aimed to transform to a fully professional military by 2010. Albania would continue to contribut to NATO operations and would increase its forces in ISAF by an additional company this year. He nted he had signed an MOU to participate in NATO's Operation Active Endeavor that day and that Albania was prepared to contribute to the NATO Response Force (NRF). Berisha assured Allies that Albania was prepared to take any steps or pass any law necessary to receive a invitation at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest to join the Alliance.

PERM REPS SEND CONSISTENT MESSAGE ON NEED FOR FURTHER REFORMS

¶8. (C) Responding to Berisha comments, Perm Reps stressed that no decisions had yet been made about which countries would be invited to join the Alliance in 2008. Albania had made progress, but needed to do more to demonstrate democratic maturity by conducting constructive government-opposition dialogue and reforming the electoral system. Perm Reps stressed the need to strengthen the rule of law, and make progress in the fight against corruption and organized crime.

¶9. (C) Ambassador Nuland noted Albania had come a long way from a country that a generation ago was as isolated as North Korea to a country that today is an exporter of security around the world. The U.S. would like to be able to invite Albania to join NATO, but Albania's greatest obstacles were questions over its level of political maturity and questions about whether the rule of law had been implemented in an irreversible way. Albanian leaders needed to work in a bipartisan fashion to achieve consensus on national priorities. Albania should adopt OSCE-proposed electoral reforms and needed to conduct a smooth Presidential election in June. Albania had made progress in fighting organized crime, corruption, and trafficking, but there was more work to do and more high profile criminals needed to be arrested, regardless of party affiliation. President Bush's June 10 visit to Albania should be a celebration of Albania's progress, but Albania should accelerate all its reform efforts.

¶10. (C) Almost all Allies noted the need for better relations between the opposition and government and the need to reform the electoral system. Germany and the Netherlands noted the OSCE had characterized the February local elections as a "missed opportunity" to meet international election standards. UK Perm Rep Eldon said the next test would be the June election of a new President by the Parliament, for which political parties needed to find a consensus candidate in order to avoid early Parliamentary elections that would further delay reforms. Belgian Perm Rep van Daele said

Belgium and other European countries have had to deal with criminal organizations originating from Albania and urged further strengthening of the rule of law. Greek Perm Rep Zepos added to the list of needed reforms the need to improve the protection of human and minority rights.

¶11. (C) Albania's defense reform efforts were discussed by Allies in a positive light. The UK welcomed what had been done in the defense sector, but cautioned that particular attention would need to be paid to the retention of soldiers as conscription is phased out by 2010. France praised Albania's defense transformation and encouraged Tirana to increase its efforts to reach Alliance standards. Italy, Romania, Hungary, Norway, the Netherlands, and the U.S. expressed appreciation for Albania's valued contributions to peacekeeping operations.

BERISHA: WE WILL DO EVERYTHING TO MEET NATO STANDARDS

¶12. (C) Berisha responded to each Perm Rep individually (and addressed the French and Belgian Perm Reps in French). He described President Bush's visit as "the greatest event in our international relations" and said it was well known that "Albanians feel very friendly toward the United States because we had a difficult history, but our cause was just and we had the support of the U.S." He said he understood the visit was also an obligation that Albania would do its best to fulfill.

¶13. (C) He agreed the fundamental mark of a free society was the rule of law and assured the NAC it was the top priority of the Albanian government. He saw "great possibilities" for a consensual election of a new President and saw the two sides coming closer to an agreed candidate. The fight against crime and corruption was being conducted in an indiscriminate manner and the majority of those arrested were from the government and his party. He stressed his conviction that Albania's reforms were irreversible and the rule of law was becoming increasingly powerful. To the Greek Perm Rep, Berisha commented that the rights of minorities were fundamental and he was proud the Unity for Human Rights Party, which represented Greek and other minorities, was part of the governing coalition. Berisha concluded by saying he had heard all the Perm Reps' messages and would do everything to meet NATO standards in order to "complete this great project."

OLSON